SLIDE #1
Title Slide

LOOKING FOR AMERICA: CHINESE IMAGES

(PART II)

Produced by the China Council of the Asia Society

SLIDE #2
U.S. Map of the World

A map of the world, made in America. At its center -- the United States. Off to the left, big but remote, is China. Americans are used to seeing the world this way.

SLIDE #3
Chinese map of the world

A map of the world, made in China. At the center, the Middle Kingdom, China. Off to the right, big but remote, is America. Not many of us, Chinese or Americans, have looked at the world any differently.

SLIDE #4
Great Wall

Beyond the great wall of their own culture and tradition, Chinese have held a variety of images about America, reflecting personal experiences as well as historical events. These are just some of their views, and from what little we know, it's not clear that Chinese have understood Americans any better than Americans have understood Chinese.

SLIDE #5
Leader of Anhui Province

From a Chinese perspective, America seems a very young country. Our history as a nation is brief compared to China's four thousand years of continuous civilization.

SLIDE #6
Field of Wheat

Another major view of the United States has been a land of remarkable peace and prosperity -- especially when compared to the repeated disruption and upheaval in Chinese life over the past century.

SLIDE #7
American Sailing Ship

The first Americans encountered by Chinese were the crew of the "Empress of China,' which arrived in the port of Canton in 1784. A cargo of furs and cotton was exchanged for tea and silk.

SLIDE #8
Executive Council of Hong Kong 1860

Americans came to China as merchants, diplomats, soldiers, and missionaries in search of wealth, adventure, and converts. For most Chinese it was hard to distinguish Americans from other foreigners. They all looked alike and had strange customs. Uncivilized, by Chinese standards.

SLIDE #9
Foreigner being carried in a chair

First impressions did not improve much during the mid-nineteenth century. Foreigners took special privileges for themselves. They used force to open treaty ports and occupied Chinese territory. While Americans did not take part in the land grabbing, they nevertheless reaped the benefits, and the consequences, of an unequal treaty system.

SLIDE #10
Chinese drawing of steam train

It was a serious confrontation between different cultures. The intruders from the West shook the very foundations of the Chinese state with their superior technology. The railroad was only one example.

SLIDE #11
Boxers and foreigners fighting (cartoon)

Military might was another. In 1900, American soldiers joined troops from seven other nations to suppress the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion. As depicted in this Chinese cartoon, the United States seemed no better than the rest. In fact, many Chinese believed America's "Open Door" policy was not so much to keep China out of foreign hands as it was to protect America's own commercial interests.

SLIDE #12
American missionary school

But many Americans came to help the Chinese. As doctors, teachers, and scholars, they earned respect and admiration. This shows a missionary-run girls' school in Shanghai.

SLIDE #13
Chinese researcher

There were also student exchange programs and research projects. Through these experiences, Chinese and Americans formed close personal ties during the 1930s and '40s.

SLIDE #14
Chinese Emigrant

Other Chinese left China to find work in America. They shared with many immigrants a vision of America as a land of wealth and opportunity.

SLIDE #15
American lynch mob

They also shared the harsh experience of many immigrants. Frontier America was depicted as a land of violence in this 1890s Chinese drawing of an American lynch mob. Note the hanging in the upper left of the picture.

SLIDE #16
Statue of Liberty
(1920s)

The Chinese could also see us in a positive light. During the nationalist revolution of the 1920s, this cartoonist looked to the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of America's ideals.

SLIDE #17
Hovels and
Skyscrapers

As Chinese learned more about the United States, they saw a land of contrasts and extremes. In this view from the 1930s, America was a country with millionaires living in skyscrapers and millions living in hovels.

SLIDE #18
Fat Capitalist

The image of the United States as a materialistic society has a long history in China. This is the fat businessman, always hungry for more money.

SLIDE #19
Uncle Sam and
Little Boy

Another recurring symbol was Uncle Sam, here having a Chinese finger pointed at him because -- his stomach's too big and his feet too small. That implied that America was a big, rich country where wealth wasn't distributed equally.

SLIDE #20
Figure of Western Woman

Now some Chinese notions about the United States were clearly exaggerated -- and some were shaped by their experience with Americans in China. The caption on this Chinese cartoon reads: "A special feature of Shanghai."

SLIDE #21
Scene from a Chinese movie

Many Chinese formed impressions from Hollywood films -- and even went so far as to imitate them. This scene is from a Chinese movie made in the 1930s.

SLIDE #22
Chinese ad for Ford cars

Western-style advertising also helped to condition the Chinese view, encouraging a positive image of American materialism.

SLIDE #23
Returned students

And students who went abroad to study often came back with new ideas and new styles of dress. This is one artist's conception of returned Chinese students from England, France, and the United States.

SLIDE #24
American pilot
as hero

All these images of America reflected larger events -- they did not exist in a political vacuum. During World War II, for example, when China and the U.S. were allied against imperial Japan, Americans were heroes to many Chinese. In this poster, the American pilot has been transformed into a Chinese god of war.

SLIDE #25
U.S. Soldier
on Mt. Fuji

A liberal Chinese journal celebrated the American victory over Japan with this cartoon: an American soldier planting the stars and stripes on Japan's Mt. Fuji while Japanese war dieties looked on in frustration.

SLIDE #26
American sailor
slugging Chinese

It must also be noted that contact between American soldiers and Chinese citizens sometimes gave rise to negative images like this one. The sign in the background reads "Sino-American cooperation."

SLIDE #27
Civil War photo

Hopes for cooperation between Chinese and Americans faded in 1949 when Mao Zedong's Communists defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. A year later, Sino-American relations took a sharp turn for the worse when North Korea invaded South Korea and first American and then Chinese troops entered the fighting.

SLIDE #28
American leaders with map

The anti-American rhetoric of that time was reflected in cartoons like this one: President Truman, along with Churchill and a bandaged Chiang Kai-shek, grieving over their losses in China, Korea, and Vietnam.

SLIDE #29
American leaders with cannon (cartoon)

In the Chinese view, the Korean War lacked popular support in America. Here, Truman, Secretary of State Acheson, and General Douglas MacArthur are shown inducing recruits to be cannon fodder. The posters read "Travel in Asia" and "Asia is Paradise."

SLIDE #30
Voice of America

The script in this cartoon reads "Voice of America." The microphone sits on a stack of silver dollars, supported by an atomic bomb. However, during the Cold War, China's leaders distinguished between the American people and the policies of the American government.

SLIDE #31
USA as building on fire

In the 1950s and '60s, many Chinese believed that American society was heading for disaster. America was depicted as a skyscraper, engulfed in flames which write out the Chinese characters for "crisis" and "disintegration."

SLIDE #32
Statue of Liberty (1950s)

America's symbol of freedom and democracy, the Statue of Liberty, was used by the Chinese government to illustrate what it saw as the hypocrisy of American life.

SLIDE #33
"Oppose Racial Discrimination"

Racism became a prominent image of life in the United States. This cover from a children's book supported the struggle of American blacks against racial discrimination.

SLIDE #34
Worker threatening Taiwan

For twenty years, the United States and China were cut off from each other. The U.S. continued diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Party on Taiwan. In the late 1950s a confrontation over two islands off China's coast led to hostile images like this.

SLIDE #35
Kennedy as U.S. tiger

In the 1960s, American troops returned to Asia to fight another war -- again at China's doorstep -- this time in Vietnam. Here, President Kennedy is snared on a jungle road, loses his "Granny-good" disguise, and is exposed as a tiger of American imperialism.

SLIDE #36
Johnson in tailspin

In turn, President Johnson was portrayed as another in a long line of foreign, long-nosed barbarians who would go down in defeat.

SLIDE #37
Chinese & Americans ping-pong players

But in 1971, China and the United States opened a new chapter in their relations. The change was signaled by this very different Chinese view of Americans: as friendly ping-pong players.

SLIDE #38
Mao & Nixon

President Nixon's trip to Peking was front page news in China, too. As official policies changed, new positive images were not far behind. It was hoped that the United States would be a counterweight to China's rival and neighbor to the north, the Soviet Union.

SLIDE #39
American tourists in China

As increasing numbers of American visitors and tourists discovered the People's Republic of China, the Chinese formed first-hand impressions. One Chinese guide described Americans as "friendly, generous, curious and impatient."

SLIDE #40
Chinese group with Mickey Mouse

Official Chinese delegations to the United States formed their own ideas about American society and the American people. One Chinese visitor commented, "Their life-style and ours are worlds apart. At first, we found much of their clothing outlandish, while they probably found ours drab and monotonous."

SLIDE #41
Chinese Woman

If Chinese seemed only politely curious about American culture and society, they were deeply interested in America's technical and material achievements.

SLIDE #42
Chinese meeting with Carter

Personal and political bridges finally led to normalization of diplomatic relations in January 1979, though certain issues between the two countries remained unresolved, including the future of Taiwan.

SLIDE #43
Chinese visiting American plant (Photo)

One reason for the breakthrough was China's determination to modernize its economy by the year 2000. As China looked outward, the vision of America as a major source of science and technology loomed large. This shows a Chinese delegation touring an American oil company refinery.

SLIDE #44
Deng with Mayor of Seattle

The new imagery of normalization was also closely tied to China's deep-seated fears of the Soviet Union. When Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping visited the United States in 1979, the highly positive television pictures beamed back to Chinese audiences served to emphasize China's changed perception of America as a potential ally, instead of an enemy.

SLIDE #45
Ozawa with B.S.O.
in China

Just as American interest in China soared, so did Chinese experience a mild epidemic of "America fever" during 1978 and '79. Chinese and American musicians performed together when the Boston Symphony Orchestra, led by Japanese-American Seiji Ozawa, played in Shanghai and Peking.

SLIDE #46
English-language
students

Studying English, listening to Voice of America Radio, and going to Western movies became very popular in China -- and seemed to spring from a reservoir of positive feelings about the United States. These are English-language students at a Chinese University.

SLIDE #47
"Hangover of
Democracy"

But there were notes of discord as well. This caricature of a Western clad Chinese dissident is labelled "the hangover of democracy." It reflects official rejection of Western-style democracy -- and ambivalence about the old image of America as a land of freedom.

SLIDE #48
Blackboard drawing of USA

Despite improved relations, many Chinese sources continued to be critical of American society. In this 1978 school lesson in geography, students were told, "America is a developed monopoly capitalist nation . . .. The broad working people are oppressed and exploited."

SLIDE #49
Korean War

And other sources, like this illustration from a 1975 children's book, reminded its readers that the United States had been China's enemy during the Korean War.

SLIDE #50
Doonesbury cartoon

In fact, we still don't know much about what most Chinese think of Americans. What we do know is that perceptions and misperceptions continue to travel the Pacific in both directions, subject to events and shifts in mood on both sides. We need to take a closer look at them, like this Doonesbury cartoon, both from our point of view and from the viewpoint of others.

SLIDE #51
New Yorker
cartoon

As in this American cartoon of Chinese school-children reading a Chinese thriller. The caption reads: "His blood ran cold as he saw the sinister round blue eyes and pink face of Johnny Jones, staring at him over the window sill."

SLIDE #52
Credit Slide